

ANTI-SEMITISM: THE RISING TIDE

The Jerusalem temple was the center of worship in ancient Israel. God had promised the temple to the Israelites through Moses and it was built during the reign of Solomon in the 10th Century B.C.—over 1700 years before Mohammed was born. Yet by a vote of 10-2 UNESCO—the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization—recently adopted a resolution denying Jewish ties to the temple mount and demanding that Israel stop celebrating its Jewish heritage in Jerusalem.

Thus, once again, do politics trample down truth. This absurd resolution is only part of a rising tide of anti-semitism around the world. Anti-semitism refers to the systematic persecution of the Jewish people—a historical phenomenon that stretches back to Old Testament times. To give but a few examples: Two centuries before Christ, a Greek tetrarch by the name of Antiochus who ruled over Israel embarked upon a program to wipe out Judaism and replace it with Greek polytheism. Jews were harrassed, beaten and murdered. Circumcision was forbidden, and if a child was found to have been circumcised, it was killed and hung around his mother's neck. Finally, Antiochus finally went too far: he slaughtered a pig and splashed the blood around the inner sanctum of the temple. That sparked a revolt which drove the Greeks out of Israel.

In 70 A.D. the Romans sacked Jerusalem, leveled the temple and scattered the Jews around the world. This came to be known as the Diaspora—the great dispersion. After that, having no homeland the Jews began to call themselves “the people of a book”—the book being the *Torah*—which we call the Old Testament.

The Christian church has been complicit in anti-semitism as well. During the Middle Ages—especially during the 11th and 12th Centuries, the Church routinely accused Jews of “blood libel”—that they used the blood of Christian babies to make their matzoh—a charge which provoked much persecution. On their way to and from the Holy Land, Crusaders frequently ravaged Jewish communities and slaughtered Jews.

In the 14th Century, as the Bubonic plague was consuming up to a third of the population Europe, Jews in Germany and Austria were accused of deliberately spreading the disease by poisoning wells—this in spite of the fact that Jews were dying of the plague right along with non-Jews. It is

estimated that over 100,000 Jews were burned alive. A Roman priest by the name of Torquemada publically burned 6000 Jewish manuscripts.

In Russia, in the four years that followed the Bolshevik Revolution (1917-1921) the communist government set about systematically eradicating Jewish communities in what were called *pogroms*. As many as 500 Jewish communities in the Ukraine were wiped out and 60,000 Jews murdered.

All of these atrocities pale in comparison to the *Shoah*, the Holocaust of WW2, where over 6 million Jews in Germany, Austria and Poland were murdered by the National Socialists.

After evidence of the Holocaust came to light after the war, anti-semitism seemed to subside for a while—at least in the West. But now there are indications that it is on the rise again. There have been attacks on Jewish synagogues and business enterprises in Paris and Belgium and London. Muslim clerics in the Mideast continue to call for the extermination of Israel, teaching their children that Jews are descended from “pigs and apes” and that the holocaust is a myth. 75 % of Muslims in the Mideast and 55% of Muslims in Western Europe hold openly anti-semitic views.

Nor are we exempt here in America. In 2006, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights reported a serious rise in anti-semitism on college campuses around the country. Anti-Israel protests have erupted at several colleges, Jewish speakers have had their invitations canceled after students threatened to disrupt their speeches. Swastikas have been painted on the doors of Jewish dormitory students. At San Francisco State University, a mob of students threated Jewish students with taunts that “*Hitler didn't finish the job.*” Even the brightest and best of our youth are not immune to this foul and virulent disease.

All these were physical expressions of anti-semitism, but there is another form—perhaps the most damaging form—which is actually born of good intentions. It might be called “spiritual anti-semitism,” and it springs from the misguided notion that the Jews don't need to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ in order to be saved. This is not only used by individuals as an excuse not to share the Gospel with the Jews who, admittedly, aren't fond of hearing it, but it has also been adopted as a formal policy by both the Roman Catholic Church and the German Lutheran Church. In 2005, Pope Benedict XVI stated *ex cathedra** that the Jews can be saved apart from faith in Jesus Christ. Now the German Lutheran Church has joined in, stating formally this year—the year we celebrate the 500th anniversary of

* Latin for “from the chair,” ^{applicable} non questions of faith or morals, when the pope speaks “infallibly”

the Reformation—that the Christian church has neither the responsibility—**nor even the right**—to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with Jews.

All this in spite of the fact that the Jews were the very people Jesus insisted be first to hear the Gospel. When he first sent out his disciples to proclaim that the Kingdom of God was at hand, he said: *“Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost children of Israel.”* (Matt. 10:5-6) Whenever Paul, a rabbinic Jew and Pharisee, arrived in a new town on one of his missionary journeys, he always went first to the synagogue and proclaimed the Gospel to the Jews. The prophets were all Israelites and the Apostles were all Jews. The first Christian church—the church in Jerusalem—consisted almost entirely of Jews who had turned to Christ. Jesus said, *“Nobody comes to the Father except through me”* and Peter said, *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”* (John 14:6) and (Acts 4:12) Yet the German Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church say that faith in Jesus Christ is not necessary to be saved.

Oh it sounds friendly and (even more important) *tolerant*. Right? **Wrong!** To deny Jews the right to hear God’s plan for their salvation is neither friendly nor tolerant, it is heartless and cowardly. God’s plan for the Jewish people is clearly outlined by Paul in *Romans 11*:

1. Salvation for the Gentiles came from the Jews.
2. God wants to use Gentile salvation to call the Jews back to him.
3. It is not too late for Jewish people to repent and believe the Gospel.
4. Only in this way will “all Israel” be saved.

Rm 10:21 - 11:8 & 11:11-23

Avi Snyder writes in a recently published book entitled *Jews Don’t Need Jesus & Other Misconceptions*: *“Are we Jews the chosen people? Yes, we are. Then aren’t we already saved? No, we’re not....we need to understand what the Hebrew Scriptures mean when they apply the term ‘chosen’ to us Jews. God chose the Jewish people to perform a particular task: to be a light to the nations [proclaim the Gospel]....[But] we can’t proclaim the Gospel until we believe the Gospel, and we can’t believe the Gospel until we hear the Gospel, and we can’t hear the Gospel until someone brings it to us.”* (*Jews for Jesus quarterly*; May, 2017).

God loves the Jews. He honored them by giving them the Patriarchs, the Law of Moses and the temple worship. He entrusted them with the promises of Messiah that pervade the writings of the *Old Testament*

prophets. He wants to save them so much that he wept over them, saying, *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'"* (Matt. 23:37-39) God loves all people and wants them to be saved and that includes the Jews. But He will only do it in His own way: through His Son, Jesus Christ.

This month ^(May) the Jewish people will celebrate the Feast of Purim, a feast that is based upon the account of God's deliverance of the Jews of Persia from the wicked Haman, as recorded in the *Book of Esther*. Purim is a day of remembrance and rejoicing. Thanks to God's intervention through Mordechai and his adopted daughter Esther, the evil Haman's plan to annihilate the Jewish people was exposed and defeated. When Mordechai first discovered the plan, he urged his daughter to persuade King Xerxes to cancel it. When Esther initially seemed hesitant to speak to the king, Mordechai told her: *"...if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will come for the Jews from another place....Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"* (Esther 4:14).

Most churches have chosen to remain silent about the Biblical mission to the Jews. Some churches have even adopted policies saying that Jewish outreach is irresponsible and unnecessary. We have not. The Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod has an active outreach to the Jewish people in the name of Jesus Christ. It is called "Apple of His Eye Ministries." The leader of that outreach, a man by the name of Allan Butterfield, was a fellow student at seminary. It is the Lutheran counterpart to *Jews for Jesus*, a Jewish outreach to other Jews with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I have untold admiration for both groups. They are some of the most courageous evangelists I have ever known.

Of course it's hard. Of course it's risky. Of course you risk the possibility of a hostile response. But eternal lives are at stake! During the Holocaust, most of the Christians in Germany and Austria and Poland remained silent although they knew what was going on. In fairness, they would have risked their lives to speak out. We don't have to risk our lives. All we have to do is risk an unpleasant encounter. Please, God, let us not remain silent too.

Amen.

Matt. 10:1-8 Jesus Sends Out the Twelve

10 Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

² These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. ⁶ Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. ⁷ As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ ⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.